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ABSTRACT

Issues that are central to science when the object of inquiry is the human being need clarification and analysis. These issues can be formulated as a question, such as, "How can researchers in adult and continuing education conduct research that is empirical human science; that is, how can they study human beings as persons with values, will, and freedom, and still meet the requirements of a scientific community?" The focus of research in adult and continuing education, as in most other areas in the human sciences, has been knowledge for prediction and control. As a field of practice, however, it also needs knowledge about human growth and development. Research studies in the human sciences have often suffered from the tendency to increase the objectivity of the study by ignoring the human condition, or to neglect objectivity while pursuing subjective aspects through self-reporting techniques, interviews, and so on. The impact of these competing constraints on research in the social sciences has restricted its content. In order to conduct research that is empirical human science, researchers need to examine the relationship of philosophy and science, particularly the meaning of subjectivity and objectivity in phenomenological philosophy. Phenomenology as a philosophy has as its chief concern "everything presented to us directly." No objects as such exist, only subjective experiences that refer to objects. Phenomenology's definitions of subjectivity and objectivity can demonstrate that empirical science and human science are not contradictory. Graduate students in adult education should understand this philosophy in order to be able to conduct more meaningful research. (KC)

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CRITICAL ISSUES IN EMPIRICAL HUMAN SCIENCE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHENOMENOLOCY

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of writing this paper began in early 1983, when I was fortunate to participate in a graduate seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The seminar was conducted by Prof. Robert D. Boyd, who was also doctoral advisor for most of the seminar participants. It was, therefore, a very congenial group, providing the setting for spirited discussions and critique of ideas at the heart of science.

Of paramount concern to us all was the pursuit of research involving some of the most subjective aspects of human experience: states of consciousness, psychosocial development, the animus/anima, grief work, and female identity. Pursuit of these research areas was accompanied by nagging questions about science itself, how we become researchers, and how we conduct research when human beings study other human beings.

The experience was exhilirating and adventuresome, in the sense that we had a forum for articulating questions seldom raised in graduate research programs. It was also uncommonly gratifying and educational in the true sense: opening new doors of thought and challenging me to more precise and critical thinking. While the ideas expressed in the paper are my own, I am indebted to all the seminar participants for their contributions, and particularly to Prof. Boyd, without whom the seminar would not have been offered. It is to the seminar participants and Prof. Boyd, a genuine community of scholars, for whom this paper is dedicated.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN EMPIRICAL HUMAN SCIENCE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHENOMENOLOGY

One of the most intense topics of discussion among graduate students in adult and continuing education concerns the research process. This is evident from discussions about qualitative and quantitative research in journals, formal conferences, and informal groups. The impetus for these discussions stems from the difficulties experienced in conducting research which is both empirical and meaningful. Empiricism seems to suggest a rigid objectivism, while meaningfulness implies an orientation toward subjectivity and the concrete realities of life. In an attempt to deal with this integrative challenge, many recent studies have incorporated anthropological methods in their design.

This paper is an outgrowth of these highly important discussions and debates, which are occuring throughout the social sciences. The first and most critical task before us is clarification of the issues which lie at the heart of these debates. Without this clarification, we are prone to raise less significant questions, such as those regarding qualitative and quantitative data. While these questions reflect legitimate concerns, they inevitably carry us away from, not toward, the kind of critical analysis we need in order to meet this integrative challenge in the research process.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, clarification and analysis of the issues which are central to doing science when the object of inquiry is the human being. These issues, when

distilled, can be formulated as questions: How can we in adult and continuing education conduct research which is empirical human science? That is, how can we study human beings as persons, with all that implies (purposes, values, will and freedom) and still meet the requirements of a scientific community?

Clarification and analysis of the issues inherent in these questions necessitates: (1) a brief discussion of adult and continuing education research within the context of Western scientific tradition; (2) preliminary comments on phenomenological philosophy; and (3) more extensive discussion of concepts derived from phenomenology and philosophy of science. Greater attention will be given to the related concepts of subjectivity-objectivity from the viewpoint of phenomenology. While they are no less significant, time constraints will limit the discussion of consensibility and intersubjectivity, concepts pertinent to philosophy of science. The paper will conclude with a suggested agenda for graduate programs in adult and continuing education.

The focus of research in adult and continuing education, like most other areas in the human sciences, has been knowledge for prediction and control. As a field of practice, however, it also has need of knowledge about human growth and development. This has required research of subjective aspects of human experience, where self-report, participation-observation and projective techniques become essential methods of data collection. While studies of this kind are not new (Snygg & Combs, 1949), they have not been commonplace. A major reason for the dearth of research is the positivist bias of Western science: "Scientific

research has been looking largely 'where the light is better' - where the knowledge sought can be measured and quantified" (Harman, 1981).

Positivism is not the only bias in our scientific tradition; reductionism, psychologism, physicalism, and scientism also influence the way we think about the social sciences, and about what constitutes the proper content of social science. These biases have been comprehensively discussed and critiqued by scientists as well as philsophers (Bernstein, 1978; Ziman, 1978; Popper, 1965; Strasser, 1963). The foundation of these biases is an objectivistic attitude which propels the researcher toward a search for manifest truth, replicating physical science in its mathematization and idealization of the world. This produces split, or competing images of the human being: a manifest image and a scientific image of human beings-in-the-world, with the former considered pre-scientific and the latter considered the true and the real (Bernstein, 1978).

The impact of these competing images on research in the social sciences has been dramatic, especially in terms of its content. The restricted content has been noted even by scholars in the physical sciences: "One of the most puzzling aspects of modern scientific knowledge is its selective inattention to human consciousness" (Harman, 1981). The search for a new understanding of the social sciences, which includes the depth and breadth of human experience as topics for research, has ensued.

This search has been triggered by a new viewpoint among many researchers. Increasingly, they undertake research devoted to the human being "as a concrete spiritual-material unity, to his concrete behavior, his concrete way of living, his concrete realizations" (Strasser, 1963). This profound and fundamental shift in viewpoint is expressed in new terminology for the social or behavioral sciences: science of society (Ziman), sciences of human life (Bernstein), and human sciences (Strasser). This paper will use the term, "human sciences," indicating the study of that which is specifically human, individually or collectively.

Some research in adult and continuing education is conducted from this human science viewpoint. Research problems are formulated with the conception of the human being as subject and as originator or creator of his/her world. This conception is found in assumptions undergirding many studies of human growth and development, be it in the context of small groups, program development, administration and supervision, or teaching and learning. The methodology of these studies complements these assumptions, with many utilizing ethnographic, participant-observation and unstructured interviewing methods. While each study has its own specific purpose, this body of research generally intends to study the subjective, to acquire meaningful data in the context of real-life situations, and to develop theory grounded in human reality (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

While these studies attempt to conduct empirical human science, the degree to which they do so is in question. A major source of

difficulty concerns the philosophical orientation subsumed within the research; the orientation is either rarely explicated or not wholly understood. This is clearly the case, for example, when researchers choose qualitative research methods to focus on the subjective. The corollary is, then, that quantitative methods focus on the objective.

This is an unsound line of reasoning which not only affects the quality of our research, but distracts us from the central question: How can we conduct research which is empirical human science? In order to arrive at a logically sound and scientifically justifiable answer, we need to examine the relationship of philosophy and science, particularly the meaning of subjectivity and objectivity in phenomenological philosophy. Doing so will demonstrate that there is no contradiction in the terms, "empirical," which suggests objectivity, and "human," which suggests subjectivity.

Phenomenology, like other schools of philosophy, is extremely complex in its subject matter and modes of analysis. There are also many branches of phenomenology, the major branches being Husserlian or transcendental phenomenology, and non-transcendental phenomenology. The most active phenomenologists have traditionally come from Europe, especially Germany, the Netherlands, and France. This is still the case today.

Phenomenology, as the name implies, has phenomena as its chief concern, meaning "everything presented to us directly, i.e., without mediating inferences, exactly in the way it is presented to us" (Spiegelberg, p. 139). There are no objects, as such, in

the phenomenological system of thought; only phenomena and non-phenomena, or non-presenting objects. The route or way to phenomena is through subjective experience, which involves two parallel and equally important features: the intending experience and the intended object of experience. Because human experience itself opens the doors to phenomena, phenomenological analysis begins with the everyday life world (Umwelt). It thus achieves the aim of systematic and intersubjective knowledge by first examining and describing the experiencing subject as the center of this everyday life world (Spiegelberg, 1975). This clearly contrasts with the positivist aim of ascertaining facts and truth discovered in an uncentered objective world where the researcher is organizer of scientific experiences in which the human "subject" is observed.

With only these preliminary remarks about phenomenology, one can understand its appeal to those in the human sciences, especially those who recognized the need for a philosophy compatible with the conception of the human being as subject and creator. These scientists have often used a phenomenological viewpoint, explicitly or implicitly, because it embraces this conception. Furthermore, many regard phenomenology as advancing,or being solely concerned with, the subjective aspect of human existence. Unfortunately, this is translated by researchers into an emphasis on situationalism and the collection of qualitative data.

Careful examination of the literature in phenomenology points out the inaccuracies in our interpretation of the phenomenological

view with respect to subjectivity and objectivity. A major source of these inaccuracies is the global interpretation of these concepts, and the primacy attributed to subjectivity. When viewing this problem from the historical perspective, it becomes clear why such inaccuracies have occured. Phenomenology was a rebuke of the positivist bias and objectivistic attitude, which was also deplored by many scientists. Their focus slowly but surely turned to the subjective.

The most concise statement of the phenomenological position regarding subjectivity and objectivity, and their inter-relationship, is contained in the phrase, "Zu den Sachen," that is, "to the things themselves." Husserl frequently used this expression to describe phenomenology's primary task. Taken literally, it seems to imply a focus on things or objects, and therefore primarily on objectivity -- quite the opposite of our expectations and interpretations! In point of fact, the mandate "Zu den Sachen" expresses how phenomenology turns objectivity on its head, providing it with a new and powerful meaning. Husserl realized that the only route "to the things themselves," to the discernment, description and analysis of phenomena, was through the everyday life world. This ultimately led back to the experiencing subject, the person. Thus, the objective sphere of human existence could only be discerned by tracing its foundations in the subjective sphere, human consciousness itself. For this reason, some have characterized phenomenology as "the triumph of objectivity over subjectivity, or better, as the establishment of objectivity in

the very heart of subjectivity" (Spiegelberg, 1975).

A closer scrutiny of the literature also reveals that subjectivity and objectivity are highly refined concepts which are best understood in relation to one another and to other concepts, such as consciousness, encounter, and fact. We commonly think of subjectivity as the reality which is experienced by an individual. It has multiple levels of meaning in phenomenology. We can think of subjectivity in the sense of: (1) personal or idiosyncratic, where variation occurs case by case; (2) subject-dependent, where variation depends upon something, such as an independent variable; and (3) subject-related, the broadest of the meanings, where variation occurs in relation to something (Spiegelberg, 1975). In this framework, subject-dependence is a special case within subject-relatedness. Research in the human sciences examines subject-related phenomena, whereas most social science research investigates subject-dependent phenomena.

Like subjectivity, objectivity also has a general or popular connotation: a condition occurring when a person's observations are in agreement with the facts. Phenomenology, however, not only conceives of levels of objectivity, but distinguishes these levels from that form of objectivity, objectivism, associated with science. Objectivism tends to systematically eliminate specifically human factors, such as freedom, values, and purpose, from the scope of scientific observation and analysis. Objectivity, on the other hand, is set apart from objectivism and the accompanying naivety of scientism (Ziman, 1978; Strasser, 1963). The levels of objectivity

in phenomenology each stand in direct relationship to the individual's increasing freedom (Strasser, 1963).

The first level is the pre-scientific level, and corresponds to the objectivity of the everyday world. In this world, reality is objectified through the processes of isolation, identification, and naming. Language plays a significant role in these processes in that different perspectives derived from individual perceptions can be expressed and shared. Thus, the "we" and "I" emerge in human society.

The second level is the scientific level, and corresponds with universal objectivity. In this world, reality is objectified through an entirely different process. This process begins with (1) the isolation which occurs in apprehending the facts of the everyday world, but then proceeds to (2) immutability, (3) the "standing apart" of the fact, (4) the association of fact with methodic idea, and finally, (5) its verifiability through the methodic idea. The end result of this process is a system of universal thought which approximates reality, and is never identical to reality (Ziman, 1978; Popper, 1962). This enables people to step away from the pluralities and traditions of the everyday world in order to understand and grasp the meaning of human behavior. When this is achieved, more appropriate praxis and guides to action can be developed in view of this understanding.

The third and final level pertains to wisdom and corresponds with transcedent objectivity. This level is not concerned with

fact, as are the everyday and scientific worlds, but with meaningfulness itself, insofar as it can be ascertained through philosophical reflection and analysis. Existentialism exemplifies this level of objectivity.

As researchers with a human sciences viewpoint, we have primary interest in the second or scientific level of objectivity where the process of discerning fact is different from the first level. The difficulty occurs in conducting the process in such a way that our knowledge can be said to be scientific knowledge of that which is specifically human. At this point our questions and understanding must broaden to include concepts in the domain of philosophy of science, particularly those concerning epistemology. We begin with remarks about the distinction among objects of inquiry in the sciences, while expanding our discussion of subjectivity and objectivity.

The process or method of arriving at scientific fact is intricately related to the kind of relationship existing between the researcher and the object of inquiry. The relationship of the physical scientist to his/her object of inquiry (an atom, plant, or the moon) can be characterized as a subject-object relationship. The researcher who studies human behavior must engage in another kind of relationship. It is a subject-subject relationship which is characterized as an encounter: "In investigating man as man, we are dealing with an encounter of human beings, animated by different intentions. No matter in what

way the encounter takes place, it is always based on a subject to subject relationship" (Strasser, 1963).

The interview provides an excellent example of encounter in a research situation. It is readily apparent that both researcher and respondent bring their own perspectives, life histories, and intentions to the interview. As researchers, our intentions are conveyed in two languages: the interview language, whose form and style conform to everyday life so that the respondent understands the questions, and a scientific language, which is implicit in the interview questions, and pertains to the methodic idea on which the study is constructed. (Strasser, 1963). We use the interview language, recognizing that the questions may elicit feelings and attitudes, or stimulate reflections which are apart from the research focus; indeed, the interview may inadvertently be a form of intervention, like a therapeutic interview (Sanford, 1982).

The issues or contents generated in the interview may even unwittingly elicit feelings and reactions in the researcher himself/herself, as a result of his/her own life history. Such occurrences substantiate that objectivity is a basic human attitude with its foundation in a "needy consciousness." "To acquire experience [man's] finite consciousness has to address itself to something...[therefore] man's essence in an orientation to others... nothing is objective for us, without us (Strasser, 1963).

The objectification of reality is, then, an ongoing and significant part of human experience, reflected in the diverse responses to research situations like the interview. Because we

share the bond of our humanity we can appreciate this, but as researchers we are also alerted to the difficult task which consequently lies before us: discerning objectivity from universal objectivity. The difficulty is in arriving at universal, or scientific, objectivity without falling prey to the extreme positions of empiricist objectivism and idealistic subjectivism. Both positions are in opposition to the main thrust of our concern in this paper: the conduct of empirical human science.

In order to discern objectivity and scientific objectivity in particular, we also must address the epistemological challenge in conducting research in empirical human sciences. We seek not merely scientific objectivity, but scientific knowledge, so we must answer: On what grounds is our knowledge scientific? The consensus principle is one way that the content of human knowledge is judged or determined to be scientific (Ziman, 1978). This requires a degree of consensibility in the content of science, leading to consensuality among scientists. In other words, the ideas communicated in science should be clear and unambiguous (consensible), so that the scientific community can critically evaluate and respond (consensual). The goal of science is to attain a maximum degree of consensuality regarding a particular concept or theory, although that consensus may change at a later date.

In striving for the highest degree of consensibility, or the most fully consensible communication, researchers have found mathematics to be the most unambiguous and universally valid language.

Not all content in the sciences, however, can be communicated in this form. This is evident in the content of the human sciences, as the previous discussion suggests. Paradoxically, there are examples in the development of the physical sciences where the same problem was encountered and resolved through pattern recognition, "precise, critical, intersubjectively validated visual observation" (Ziman, 1978). Pattern recognition, illustrated by taxonomy, revolutionized physical sciences like Biology and Anatomy.

Just as pattern recognition has been critical to the growth of scientific knowledge based on consensible communication in the physical sciences, human intersubjectivity is likewise critical in the human sciences. Intersubjectivity rests on the assumption that all observers are essentially equivalent, and that what is observed can be described and agreed upon. Hence, the consensus principle in the human sciences involves the perceptually consensible as well as the communicably consensual: "Visual perception by its intersubjective consensibility is an essential element in the creation and validation of scientific knowledge" (Ziman, 1978).

The significance of intersubjectivity in arriving at scientific knowledge becomes even more apparent when we consider language and its contribution to intersubjectivity. For instance, the researcher uses interview language or non-technical terminology to insure maximum communication between him/herself and the respondent. This is intersubjectivity on the level of the everyday

world. The use of scientific language goes a step further, with the focus on unambiguous (consensible) communication between the researcher and the scientific community about the subject of the investigation. This is intersubjectivity on the level of the scientific world, and makes systematic comparison possible: "Without a firm foundation for systematic comparison, it is not possible to predicate anything of a subject in a scientifically justifiable fashion" (Strasser, 1963).

Scientific language is, therefore, inextricably related to intersubjectivity and eventually objectivity. Scientific objectivity, in turn, rises out of systematic comparison. In this way, intersubjectivity is a challenge to cultural relativism and subjectivism, which argue that the content of the human sciences are impervious to scientific investigation.

In many ways our attention to consensibility and intersubjectivity brings our discussion about the research process back to its starting point. We began with the question: How can we in adult and continuing education conduct research which is empirical human science? The extensive comments on subjectivity and objectivity in phenomenological philosophy addressed substantive concepts at the core of the integrative challenge we face as researchers who investigate human behavior. We have learned that these concepts are very complex, and if wholly understood, can be applied to the conduct of empirical human science. Moreover, our position as researchers in the human sciences is strengthened when we address concerns like consensibility and

intersubjectivity. These concerns, derived from the epistemological foundations of science, are extremely important in the scientific community of which we are members, but also in all of society (Ziman, 1978).

This discussion suggests that as graduate students in adult and continuing education, we should be thoroughly and extensively knowledgeable in the areas of philosophy and of science. This means that, in addition to courses in Research Design, other courses in specific philosophies and in the philosophy of science should be considered in the graduate curriculum. Adult and continuing education can only take its place among other disciplines in the human sciences to the extent that it has highly trained graduates. This paper, then, not only presents an argument for empirical human science, but also for the education of researchers who can effectively conduct this challenging and critical kind of research.

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